

Efim Shpielberg's Mother Maria Shpielberg And A Friend Of Hers



This is my mother Maria Shpielberg (on the left) and a friend of hers. This photo was taken in Odessa in 1921.

My mother Maria Shpielberg, nee Tuman, was born in Odessa in 1902. She got some primary education. She could read and write in Russian, but she only spoke Yiddish. My mother became an apprentice of a dressmaker when she was very young. She learned this profession promptly and began to make clothes herself. She worked for an owner of a shop who paid her peanuts. Still, my mother was a big help for my grandmother in supporting the family.

My father met my mother at a party. They got married in 1928. My mother told me that the rabbi from our synagogue was invited to the wedding and there was a chuppah installed in the yard. My mother made a white gown and a veil for the wedding. My parents had three children. I was born in 1929. My sister Riva was born in 1932 and the youngest Tsylia was born in 1934. We lived in a single two-storied building in Sredniaya Street in a one-room apartment with a big verandah. My mother said that her apartment seemed like a palace to her, although we were rather poor. The walls were whitewashed and we slept on metal beds like all other neighbors. There were often bed bugs living in those beds and every now and then a housewife put her beds outside where they made a fire and put the beds into it to burn all bed bungs. Afterward the beds were repainted. There was a toilet and a water tap in the yard and housewives used to do their washing near this tap. Every Thursday before Sabbath we went to the public bathroom in Sredniaya Street. There were primus stoves to do the cooking. We had kosher utensils: there was a drawer for dairy products where we kept a big casserole for milk and few mugs. There was another box where we kept utensils for meat products. I remember very well that the household had to observe these rule. If I did something wrong I got a cuff in the nape right away. All housewives in our yard were

wonderful cooks. My mother was the best at making gefilte fish. When she started cooking it all other housewives came to watch her. When she was beginning to make the filling she asked everybody to keep silent to not spoil the fish.

During the Great Patriotic War my mother and sisters were in Nukha town in Azerbaijan [1,700 km from Odessa]. I got lost on the way there in Novorossiysk. Reunion with my family almost two years later is one of the happiest events in my life. My mother and sisters were crying and laughing seeing me. They had lost their hope to ever see me again. They lived in a small summer type barrack, but winters were mild there. We stoked a stove that served as a heater. My mother made plain flat cookies. Bread was expensive and we couldn't afford to buy any. My sisters and I went to school. My mother made and altered clothes and I helped her to turn it inside out. Those were the earnings that we had. When my mother boiled corn cereal and we could have a bowl it was good. We got stuffed inside, but it didn't reduce hunger. We went to sleep hungry and hungry we got up. When we were in evacuation the locals were friendly with us. There was no segregation. All were equal awaiting for news from the front. We didn't think about observing traditions or kashrut. The war changed everything. In 1944, when our troops liberated Odessa, we returned home. Mother went on to work as a dressmaker.

In 1968 my mother Maria Shpielberg died. We had a vague idea of Jewish traditions and buried mother without keeping to traditions. However, there was a group of older Jews at the cemetery. They recited the Kaddish for a compensation.